

VZCZCXYZ0010
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTH #0085/01 0390909
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 080909Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1495
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 000085

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/08
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MASS](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: THE CASE FOR INCREASING GREECE'S FY2012 IMET FUNDING

REF: ATHENS 73

CLASSIFIED BY: Daniel V. Speckhard, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Embassy Athens strongly supports EUCOM's request for \$500,000 IMET funding for Greece in FY2012. Returning IMET funding in Greece to 2000-2008 norms will help advance American goals by:

- Fostering strong bilateral mil-mil relations with the U.S.;
- Strengthening Greece's commitment to NATO;
- Enhancing Greek military professionalism and interoperability;
- Countering misperceptions of the U.S. ingrained in Greek society that find their way into the Greek military, as well.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY CON'T: Greece's IMET funding was decreased from \$443,000 in FY2008 to \$100,000 in FY2009, and flatlined at \$100,000 through FY2011. FY2009, the first year of implementing this near-80 percent budget cut, saw the number of Greek officers receiving Professional Military Education (PME) in the U.S. shrink from 66 to four. Further, whereas IMET funding had in the past reached and shaped upcoming junior officers, exposing them to American training and culture on their path to leadership positions, none went to the U.S. in FY2009. Greek officers across all ranks continue to serve in multilateral operations alongside American forces in headquarters and in the field, making enhanced interoperability and professionalism a continuing need. Given the general, longstanding anti-American and anti-NATO atmosphere in Greece, we believe that this dearth of training and exposure to America will have detrimental long-term effects on the Hellenic Armed Forces' overall outlook toward the U.S., and will ultimately hamper our strong mil-mil relationship. END SUMMARY.

NUMBERS ARE STARK

¶2. (SBU) Greece's annual IMET allocation from 2000 to 2008 averaged \$479,000 per year. Over this period of time, 612 officers received PME in the United States; 42 percent (260) were junior officers (Captain and below). In FY2008, Greece received \$443,000 in IMET funds, which enabled 66 officers, half of which were junior

officers, to attend 131 courses in the U.S. FY2009's dramatic decrease came as a surprise and disappointment to Greek officials; internal prioritization in the MOD resulted in a decision to send only four higher-ranking officers to senior service college courses in the U.S. (the National War College, Air Command and Staff College, Air War College, and Joint Forces Staff College). IMET levels are currently locked in at \$100,000 for FY2010; we understand the Greeks intend to use these funds in a manner similar to FY2009. A consequence of the previous decision to slash Greek IMET funding has been the absence of exposure to U.S. education and culture among Greek junior officers, the future leadership of the Hellenic Armed Forces. We missed an entire class in 2009, and stand to miss them again in 2010 and 2011. With State's Congressional Budget Justification for FY2011 having requested only \$100,000 again for Greece, FY2012 is a pivotal year. Our choice is clear: either accept the permanent lack of exposure to the U.S., or begin to return to past levels following a FY2009-FY2011 hiccup.

13. (SBU) Greece's domestic economic situation does not add optimism to hopes for Greece funding its own training in the U.S. at the levels which IMET permitted over most of the past decade. Greece's per capita GDP at purchasing power parity (\$30,856 in 2009, according to the IMF) puts it above most newer NATO Allies (Slovenia is the closest, at \$28,524), but still below most of the older, established Allies. Greece's recession and ongoing major economic crisis has led to a severe budget crunch at MOD as the government seeks to slash spending to restore the faith of international markets in the Greek economy and to avert a debt

crisis in the medium-term. The MOD took a 500-million euro hit in the 2010 budget, and it faces the potential for more cuts should Greece need to make mid-year corrections to compensate for lower revenues; its already small training budget is expected to suffer further. On February 4, the Hellenic Air Force General Staff informed our ODC office to cancel all their scheduled and requested U.S. training for 2010 as a result of these budget cuts.

ATTITUDES IN GREECE STILL NEED ADJUSTING

14. (C) Greece has always been a strategically important, yet difficult member of NATO. Though an important bulwark of NATO's southern flank during the Cold War, Greece withdrew from the Alliance's integrated military command structure in 1974 following Turkey's invasion of Cyprus (and reintegrated in 1980). Public attitudes toward both the United States and NATO have been strained under even the best times, let alone during crises. For example, NATO's bombing of Serbia in 1999 inflamed and left scars in Greek public opinion, and the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 created a negative impression in the minds of Greeks that still lingers today. A deep mistrust exists among Greeks toward NATO's policies in the Aegean Sea, which the Greeks believe favor the interests of Turkey at Greek expense. As a result, while most Greek governments see strategic value in and wish practically to foster good relations with NATO and the U.S., they seek to keep strong contributions - such as the U.S. Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay, Crete - out of the public spotlight.

15. (C) Recent surveys, one by Embassy Athens of public opinion in 2009, and one of attitudes toward NATO among active duty and retired officers by V Project Research Consulting, one of the largest research and polling companies in Greece, provide illustrative data points. Among the Greek public, only 34 percent held "favorable" views toward the U.S., while 79 percent held "favorable" views toward Russia. 83 percent "generally disagreed" that the U.S. aids in disaster relief, 86 percent "generally

disagreed" that the U.S. helps poor nations develop, and 85 percent "generally disagreed" that the U.S. promotes democracy. Among officers, 73 percent believed Greece would benefit from a military alliance with Russia. 64 percent believed that NATO should not continue operations in Afghanistan. 24 percent favored a completed or partial military withdrawal from NATO. 28 percent favored NATO's abolition. 59 percent believed NATO should not conduct "out-of-area" missions.

15. (C) This is the environment in which junior officers of the Hellenic Armed Forces grow up, go to school, and join the military. Our task in combating ill-informed, knee-jerk anti-Americanism is not complete in Athens, and IMET is a valuable tool in that effort that also leads to benefits for U.S.-Greece mil-mil relations and more support for multilateral operations. By way of example, the current Greek-equivalent Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the current CHOD have studied in America.

OUR MIL-MIL RELATIONS AND GREEK CONTRIBUTIONS TO MULTILATERAL
OPERATIONS

16. (C) U.S.-Greek mil-mil relations are strong, and have been a constant over the years in the face of oscillations in bilateral political relations. IMET has been an important aspect in building the ties, and fostering understanding and appreciation. A tangible benefit of this relationship is found at the U.S. Naval Support Activity at Souda Bay, Crete. U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the Mediterranean benefit greatly from

Souda Bay's strategic location and the fact that it has the longest runway and deepest port in the eastern Med. Continued exposure of quantities of Greek officers across all ranks to American culture, values, and military professionalism through PME is important to maintaining these relations.

17. (C) Reftel details Greece's military and financial contributions in Afghanistan. Greece is one of the top NATO troop contributors in Kosovo (and was in NATO's IFOR and SFOR operations in Bosnia, as well), and contributes to both NATO's Operation Active Endeavor counterterrorism mission and its Ocean Shield anti-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia. Greek soldiers serve alongside U.S. forces in these NATO operations. Greece has also seized the opportunity to shape NATO's future efforts in maritime interdiction by leading the NATO Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Center (NMIOTC) at Souda Bay, and provides training to Allies and NATO Partners, including facilitating some U.S. national training events at no cost.

PROPOSAL

18. (C) Post believes that the dearth of training and exposure to the U.S. system that began with the cut in Greece's IMET budget in FY2009 will have detrimental long-term effects on the Hellenic Armed Forces' overall outlook toward the U.S., and will hamper our strong mil-mil relationship. Post believes that Greece's across-the-board participation in multinational operations

alongside U.S. forces, combined with continuing anti-Americanism in society in a dreadful economic climate warrants a return to levels of IMET funding that existed over most of the past decade. As such, Post strongly supports EUCOM's request for \$500,000 in IMET funding for FY2012, and is ready to provide a plan to demonstrate how it will be put to good use, as were previous funding levels from 2000 to 2008.

Speckhard